

Winding Trails: by Al Hobart

Thursday, November 16, 1967
Illinois Valley News

Searching for Fairy Cross

As a child I was so greatly impressed by the stories of fairies that even now I experience a minor thrill at the very mention of elves, fairies, pixies, and other inhabitants of that mysterious realm of invisible, wonderful little folk. The fairy tales that once so enthralled me are of course long since outgrown. Still, those delicious impressions were so deeply etched in my young mind that a faint tracery still remains, just enough to bring back into consciousness that little stirring of mystery and exotic delight when the possible involvement of fairies is suggested.

There are fairy rings, fairy bells, fairy caps, fairy gloves, and numerous other names of objects with the imagination-stirring prefix “fairy” attached. Many of them I am acquainted with inasmuch as most of them are fanciful names of wild plants, a subject

that is a particular weakness of mine.

But when an acquaintance not long ago mentioned “fairy crosses” my fascination came boiling violently to the surface, and of course I wanted to know all about them. Fairy crosses, I was told, are metallic crystals that take the form of a cross—not the familiar crucifix, but more the shape of the well-known iron cross, or a plus mark. I later learned that they are formed by “twinning” of large crystals of combined iron, aluminum, and silica (quartz, or sand). Sometimes the hexagonal rods, an inch or two long, join in the form of a right-angle cross, or sometimes in an X shape. They are occasionally run across in mining operations, and what got me all excited was the information that a number of them had been found in the neighborhood of an old mining cabin I am familiar with.

Six miles up the Happy Camp trail, high up the side of Little Grayback and near the top of the Siskiyou divide, is the long-abandoned Porter cabin. This is one of the places where fairy crosses had been found, according to my informant, and where I optimistically decided to do a bit of prospecting.

I still don’t know what a fairy cross looks like, but I had an interesting time trying to find out. Instead of going up to the old cabin by the Happy Camp trail, I decided to try following another ancient trail that I had been over a long time ago, and that would take me to Porter’s cabin—or used to. But alas, a combination of time-imposed factors – over-growth of brush, windfalls, new forest roads, and logged-over areas all conspired to throw me off my course.

I climbed up my steep private trail for 2 or 3 miles past Hell’s Hole, beyond which point I ran into trouble. In one wild spot on the side of Page Mountain, where I lost sight of familiar landmarks, I lost my bearings and came out on the Happy Camp road at Bolan Junction, far to the north of where I wanted to go. So I hiked the 5½ miles up the Happy Camp road to the top of the divide, then a quarter of a mile down to Porter’s Cabin.

An hour of scratching around in likely-looking places with my little mattock failed to turn up anything more interesting than plain and fancy rocks, nothing in the shape of a cross. The fairies must have been in convention—

next time maybe they’ll give me a helping hand. I still had six miles to go down the old Happy Camp trail, and after that terrific uphill pull I wasn’t sure whether I could have carried home the additional weight of a little fairy cross anyway.

A quarter mile below the old cabin, where a new road is being built, I heard one of the workers holler a warning, and seconds later a heavy blast went off. As bits of debris began falling down through the trees I dashed for the shelter of a big Douglas-fir. For a short distance I sprinted neck and neck with an old doe, who shot past me like the devil was after her and disappeared in the canyon below.

Another interesting incident of a different sort occurred earlier in the trip where for a short distance I followed a smooth stretch of logging road on the upper edge of Hell’s Hole. Some distance ahead of me I noticed in the air just above the road a large globular mass of what I at first thought was a swarm of strange insects in a frenzy of courtship dancing. A gentle-breeze was blowing and the mass, retaining its general shape but actively a-stir within,

moved along above the surface of the road at about the same speed I was walking, even following the curves in the road.

On closer inspection I saw it was, a ball-like cloud of thistle down being borne along in that eerie way by the breeze, that here was partly confined to the canyon the road formed with the trees on both sides. It was a fascinating thing to watch—like a filmy apparition floating slowly along above the surface, following exactly every twist and contour of the road.

At another place a coal-black bear went scuttling off among the trees at my approach. Any lengthy hike through the mountain forests is almost sure to pay off with such interesting happenings as these. Even a leisurely drive along a high forest road will often reward me with an occasional glimpse of wild animals, as well as the feeling of ecstasy one gets in the quiet beauty all around, and the rare, clean atmosphere.

The 18-mile, 8½-hour hike was to me a valuable experience, even though I was forced to defer my acquaintance with the elusive Fairy Cross.



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Persistent Itching?

Itching is a common sensation and is usually relieved with a quick scratch. However, it can be more persistent and annoying, having a negative impact on your day to day life.

Itching can have many causes and just how we perceive itching is not totally understood. But, there are effective treatments for most types of persistent itching depending on the cause.

Causes of itching can include rashes or internal causes without a rash.

Rash-type itching: Dry skin is the most common cause in older adults. Frequent bathing, hot water and dry air can cause scales and flaking. Skin disorders such as psoriasis, dermatitis, hives and skin infections such as impetigo. Infectious diseases include shingles, scabies and lice and fungal infections in moist areas of the feet. And irritations and allergic reactions such as hives, insect bites or poison oak (a big problem in the IV!). Home treatments can include medication such as antihistamines and corticoid ointments available over the counter and elimination of the causative agent. If there is no improvement in one week or the rash gets worse, see your

health care provider.

Itching without a rash could be the result of a liver disease, kidney failure, anemia, thyroid problems or some cancers. Medication and some food allergies can cause itching. A pinched or damaged nerve can send an itch signal when there is no actual skin itch. And psychological problems such as anxiety, depression or stress can be associated with itching. Once the underlying cause can be determined, relief may be achieved by treating the underlying cause. Relief may not be immediate, but localized anesthetics such as lidocaine or benzocaine ointments and lotions such as peppermint, camphor or calamine may help. Capsaicin, derived from chili peppers can be an effective counter-irritant. Placing a damp cloth over the itching may “cool down” the sensation. Working to reduce stress can also help to reduce itching. Seeking prompt care for a persistent or severe itch may help keep a treatable problem from becoming something worse.

MayoClinic HealthLetter, July, 2013.

You can contact I.V. Wellness Resources at 541-592-9781 or www.ivwellnessresources@gmail.com and please like our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ivwellnessresources.

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WELLNESS CHECKS If you know a senior that you are worried about and feel they need a wellness check. Please call Laura at I.V. Wellness Resources at 541-592-9781.	CHAIR FITNESS Classes FREE at Healthy U, TUESDAYS & THURSDAYS from 1 - 1:45 p.m. 535 E. River St., Cave Junction Call 541-592-4888 or visit www.healthyucenter.org .	HEATING ASSISTANCE For financial assistance with heating your home - electric or wood - call UCAN at 541-956-4050	FOOD & FRIENDS New location for Food and Friends dining will switch to the Senior Center, 520 River St., Wednesday, Nov. 15	CARING CALLER Are you isolated in your home and need a phone friend to call you with daily or weekly phone calls? Call Laura 541-592-9781 to sign up or to volunteer.
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